

Power and Class Conflict in Bullet Train (2022): A Marxist Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the representation of power relations and class conflict in the film Bullet Train (2022) directed by David Leitch by applying a Marxist perspective. The purposes of this research are to analyze how power is portrayed among the characters and to identify how class conflict is represented in the film. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. The data are collected from scenes, dialogues, character actions, and visual elements in the film. The data are analyzed using Marxist theory, particularly concepts of bourgeoisie and proletariat, exploitation, hegemony, alienation, and class struggle. The results of this research show that power in Bullet Train is dominated by characters who control capital and organizational structures, particularly the White Death, who represents the bourgeois class. Meanwhile, characters such as Ladybug and other assassins represent the proletariat who sell their labor and operate under systems they do not control. Class conflict is represented through fragmented and individualized struggles among the working-class characters, where competition replaces solidarity. The train functions as a metaphor for capitalist society, symbolizing confinement, hierarchy, and continuous conflict driven by capital. This research concludes that Bullet Train is not only an action-comedy film, but also a cultural text that reflects capitalist power structures and ongoing class conflict in contemporary society.

Keywords: *Marxism; power relations; class conflict; film analysis; Bullet Train (2022)*

INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, social inequality continues to grow despite the rapid advancement of technology and media. The gap between the ruling class and the working class is increasingly visible in various aspects of life, such as access to resources, economic opportunities, and cultural representation. These conditions indicate that capitalism continues to shape human relations through systems of domination and control, where power is often concentrated in the hands of a few. Economic disparities have widened globally, with the richest 1% owning more wealth than the bottom 50% combined, demonstrating how capital accumulation reinforces class divisions. As a result, social tension and class conflict become recurring issues reflected not only in reality but also in cultural production, including contemporary cinema.

Film has become a powerful cultural medium that reflects and critiques social realities, particularly issues of power and class struggle. As a mirror of society, film often dramatizes how individuals navigate systems of domination and control. Domination does not necessarily reduce oppressed subjects to passivity, as resistance may emerge through the rejection of imposed roles (Nurdilah & Rahmawati, 2025). Through narratives and character interactions, cinema exposes tensions between privileged and marginalized groups, functioning simultaneously as an artistic and ideological product. In the context of late capitalism, popular cinema operates dually: it

entertains while also encoding and naturalizing dominant ideologies (Faisal et al., 2022). Action films, in particular, frequently display and contest power relations, making them productive sites for ideological analysis.

Bullet Train (2022), directed by David Leitch, serves as a compelling case study for examining these dynamics. Beneath its fast-paced action, dark humor, and confined setting, the film reflects deeper socio-political tensions. The film grossed over \$239 million worldwide, demonstrating its broad cultural reach and influence. Set within a high-speed train that functions as a microcosm of hierarchical society, the narrative presents characters from diverse social and economic backgrounds struggling for survival under invisible systems of power. This study focuses on Ladybug, the film's central character, who represents a working-class figure trapped within structures of domination. Through his experiences, the film illustrates how power and class conflict operate within the logic of capitalism, where individuals are forced into competition and violence while structural inequality remains intact.

This research is significant because it emphasizes that film is not a neutral medium but a cultural text that embodies and reproduces ideological structures. *Bullet Train* presents a narrative in which power, hierarchy, and survival intersect, yet critical discussions rarely examine how these elements reveal deeper socio-economic tensions. In an era marked by extreme wealth inequality and the normalization of precarious labor, understanding how popular culture represents and potentially legitimizes such conditions becomes increasingly important. Accordingly, this study addresses two main research questions: (1) How are power relations portrayed in *Bullet Train (2022)*? and (2) How is class conflict represented in *Bullet Train (2022)*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A solid theoretical foundation is needed to understand how power relations and class conflict in *Bullet Train (2022)* reflect broader capitalist structures in contemporary society. This research uses Marxism as the main framework because it focuses on the relationship between the ruling class and the working class in a world where capital increasingly dominates human existence and social relations. The theories used here are well-established, relevant to the problem, and updated to reflect current discussions in film studies, cultural criticism, and political economy. Film serves as a critical medium for examining these issues, as it not only entertains but also functions as a cultural text that encodes, reproduces, and sometimes challenges dominant ideologies embedded within capitalist society.

Film as Cultural and Ideological Medium

Cinema operates as both an artistic expression and an ideological product that reflects the material conditions and social relations of its time. According to Faisal et al. (2022), popular cinema in the era of late capitalism functions dually: it entertains audiences while simultaneously encoding and naturalizing dominant ideologies. Action films, in particular, frequently display power relations through narratives of conflict, survival, and competition, making them productive sites for ideological analysis. Films do not merely represent reality but actively construct it

through narrative choices, visual symbolism, and character development, shaping how audiences understand social hierarchies and power structures.

The relationship between film and society is dialectical. Films emerge from specific socio-economic contexts and bear the imprints of class relations, yet they also participate in reproducing or challenging these relations through their circulation in popular culture. As Wijaya and Putri (2023) argue, film narratives serve as vehicles for ideological power, often working to maintain existing social orders by presenting capitalist values as natural and inevitable. Understanding film as a cultural text requires examining not only its surface narrative but also the deeper structural and symbolic elements that reveal embedded ideologies.

Marxist Theory: Foundations and Key Concepts

Marxism provides a critical theoretical framework for analyzing power relations and class conflict, particularly through its emphasis on the relationship between the ruling class (bourgeoisie) and the working class (proletariat). According to Marxist theory, domination is not merely exercised through individual authority but is embedded within social and economic structures that shape human relations (Shafti, 2024). Power operates through ownership of the means of production, resulting in exploitation, alienation, and systemic inequality. Marx's assertion that the history of all societies is the history of class struggle remains central to understanding both material conditions and cultural production.

Marxist Feminism and Intersectional Perspectives

From a Marxist feminist perspective, scholars argue that misogyny and sexism are not solely cultural phenomena but structural mechanisms through which capitalism exploits women's labor and reinforces economic dependency (Aprilyani & Rahmawati, 2025). This perspective expands Marxist analysis by highlighting how class oppression intersects with gender, further reinforcing hierarchical power relations within capitalist systems.

Previous Study

Previous studies have applied Marxist theory to film analysis in various contexts. Dahlan et al. (2025), for example, examined *The Hunger Games* and identified class distinctions between the Capitol and the districts as symbolic representations of capitalist oppression. Similarly, Kusumastuti and Nugroho (2017) analyzed Indonesian historical films, focusing on the visual and narrative construction of bourgeois and proletarian identities through costume and character positioning. Other scholars, such as Derojat et al. (2023) and Wijaya and Putri (2023), have explored how contemporary media reproduces ideological structures and power relations through narrative strategies.

Research Gap and Contribution

Despite this growing body of research, few studies have applied Marxist analysis to *Bullet Train* (2022). The film presents class struggle within a closed and fragmented environment, where domination is personalized through character conflict yet reflects broader systemic inequality. Unlike films that depict collective resistance, *Bullet Train* emphasizes individualized struggle and competition, reflecting neoliberal ideology that prioritizes survival and self-interest over class solidarity. This gap in existing scholarship provides an opportunity to examine how

class conflict is visualized through fragmented labor and competitive violence within capitalist logic.

Although Wirija (2025) approaches cinematic domination from an existentialist feminist perspective, the study's discussion of hierarchical power relations and structural control remains relevant to Marxist film analysis. The findings support the idea that domination operates primarily through systemic inequality rather than individual agency, reinforcing the applicability of Marxist theory in analyzing contemporary cinema.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative research design using descriptive analysis to explore how *Bullet Train* (2022) represents themes of power and class conflict through the lens of Marxist theory. According to Sugiyono (2022), a qualitative case study is a research method used to study an event, program, or activity in depth within a specific time and context. Creswell (2018) explains that qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning of a social phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon is represented through the characters, scenes, and messages shown in the film. The primary data of this study is taken from the film *Bullet Train* (2022), produced by David Leitch, Kelly McCormick, and Antoine Fuqua, directed by David Leitch, written by Kōtarō Isaka, and released by Sony Pictures Releasing in 2022 with a duration of 126 minutes. The secondary data consists of various written sources including journal articles, theses, and research papers related to Marxist theory and film analysis that support interpretation and theoretical arguments.

The techniques used for collecting data consist of observation and documentation. According to Sugiyono (2021), observation in qualitative research involves systematic watching and noting of events or behaviors relevant to the research focus. The researcher observed *Bullet Train* (2022) several times to identify scenes, dialogues, symbols, and visual details that relate to Marxist concepts such as power and class relations. Documentation involves collecting film transcripts, screenshots, dialogues, and visual materials that serve as evidence for analysis. The data analysis process follows a qualitative descriptive method. As Creswell (2018) states, qualitative data analysis involves organizing, interpreting, and describing data to identify emerging patterns and meanings. The researcher analyzes film elements such as scenes, dialogue, characterization, and mise-en-scène to understand how they represent the concepts of power and class conflict within the Marxist framework. The stages include: (1) watching the film and identifying relevant scenes, (2) writing descriptions of selected scenes and dialogues, (3) developing thematic analyses connecting film elements to Marxist concepts, (4) supporting analysis with relevant academic sources, and (5) writing comprehensive interpretations explaining how the film represents power relations and class struggle.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This chapter addresses the answers to the two research questions formulated in Chapter One. This chapter starts with the report of the results of data analysis that answers the first and

the second research questions. After that, this study provides further explanations in the Discussion part

Marxist Class Categorization of Characters in Bullet Train

The characters in Bullet Train can be divided into two primary Marxist classes based on their relationship to power and the means of production. The bourgeoisie consists of The White Death, The Elder, and The Prince, who exercise control through capital ownership, ideological authority, and information manipulation rather than physical labor. In contrast, the proletariat includes Ladybug, Tangerine, Lemon, The Wolf, The Hornet, and Yuichi Kimura, who sell their labor and specialized skills within hierarchical systems they do not control, functioning as disposable workers in a capitalist structure of organized violence.

Power Relations in Bullet Train (2022)

1. The White Death as the Embodiment of Bourgeois Power

The character of the White Death represents the ultimate manifestation of bourgeois power in the film. As the unseen puppet master who controls the fate of other characters, the White Death embodies the capitalist class that owns and controls the means of production. His power is not derived from physical presence or direct action, but from his position within the economic structure that allows him to command others and determine their survival. This reflects what Marx termed the "*invisible hand*" of capital, power that operates through structures rather than individuals, making resistance difficult because the source of domination remains obscured. Throughout most of the film, the White Death remains invisible, yet his influence permeates every action and decision made by other characters. When Tangerine and Lemon discover the son is dead and the briefcase potentially compromised, Tangerine's immediate panic,

"We're dead. We're dead,"

Reveals the absolute power the White Death holds over them despite his physical absence. Their fear is not of physical confrontation but of economic and social annihilation, demonstrating how bourgeois power operates through the threat of exclusion from the means of survival. This absence reflects how capitalist power operates not through direct coercion alone, but through systemic control that makes the dominant class seem omnipresent yet untouchable (Kurniawan, 2025). The workers police themselves, internalize the expectations of capital, and reproduce their own subordination without constant supervision, a phenomenon Foucault described as disciplinary power, which complements Marx's economic analysis.

When the White Death finally appears at Kyoto station in the film's climax, his physical presence confirms his position of absolute dominance. He calmly walks through the chaos of the crashed train, surrounded by armed bodyguards, demonstrating complete confidence in his power. The *mise-en-scène* of this moment is crucial: while assassins lie injured or dead around him, he remains pristine in an expensive suit, untouched by the violence he orchestrated. His monologue explicitly articulates his bourgeois worldview:

"I brought them all here to die."

revealing how he views other human beings as mere instruments for his purposes. This god-like orchestration demonstrates the extent of bourgeois power: the ability to control entire networks of human activity, to purchase violence, and to determine who lives and dies based purely on personal grievance and available capital.

The White Death's backstory further illuminates the nature of bourgeois power. He built his criminal empire through what Marx called "primitive accumulation" the use of violence to seize control of productive resources. The Elder explains that the White Death "decimated the Minegishi yakuza clan" and took control of Japan's underworld despite being a Russian outsider. This hostile takeover demonstrates how capital accumulation requires initial violence to establish control, after which economic mechanisms can maintain domination more efficiently. His current position as head of "the world's largest crime syndicate" shows how successful primitive accumulation creates monopolistic power that becomes increasingly difficult to challenge. The syndicate operates as a corporation, with hierarchical management, specialized divisions of labor, and profit-driven decision-making all characteristic features of capitalist organization applied to criminal enterprises.



Figure 1. White Death said to Ladybug that he is in control of all proletarians. (Minute 01:43:52)



Figure 2. White Death said to Ladybug that he also brought the proletarians to die. (Minute 01:43:55)

2. Capital as the Source of Power: The Briefcase

The briefcase in *Bullet Train* functions as a symbol of capital, the core of capitalist power. As Burns (2024) notes, capital enables the accumulation of wealth, investment, and control over

labor. Every character in the film is connected to the briefcase, either as protectors, retrievers, or obstacles. The object itself becomes a source of conflict, demonstrating how capital creates competition and violence among the working class. The assassins fight over the briefcase not because they have personal stakes in its contents, but because they are paid to do so, reflecting the alienation inherent in capitalist labor relations. The briefcase contains ten million dollars in ransom money, yet this enormous sum means nothing to the workers who risk their lives because they will receive only their pre-negotiated wages regardless of the briefcase's value.

The circulation of the briefcase throughout the train mirrors the movement of capital in capitalist society. It changes hands multiple times, creating alliances and betrayals, yet ultimately returns to serve the interests of the White Death. This circulation demonstrates what Marx called the "circuit of capital"—money transforms into commodities (hired assassins), which produce more value (retrieved ransom), which converts back into money, completing the cycle of accumulation. Each time the briefcase changes hands, violence erupts, illustrating how capital mobility requires and produces social conflict. Moreover, the characters' willingness to kill and die for the briefcase illustrates the reification of social relations under capitalism, where commodities govern human interactions rather than genuine social bonds. Ladybug doesn't fight Tangerine and Lemon because of personal animosity but because a material object representing capital mediates their relationship.

The briefcase also functions as what Marx termed a "*fetish object*"—an inanimate thing that appears to possess inherent power and value, obscuring the social relations that create its worth. Characters treat the briefcase as if it possesses magical importance, when its significance derives entirely from the social relations and power structures surrounding it. Without the White Death's authority and the assassins' willingness to work within the system, the briefcase would be merely a container with paper inside. Yet everyone treats it as supremely valuable, demonstrating how capitalism mystifies social relations by making objects appear more important than the human labor and relationships that give them meaning.

Furthermore, the briefcase reveals how capitalism commodifies everything, including human life and relationships. The original purpose of the money ransom for the White Death's son, shows how even familial bonds become subject to economic calculation under capitalism. Love, loyalty, and kinship are reduced to monetary equivalents. The assassins hired to protect the son and retrieve the ransom similarly commodify violence and death, selling these as services in a market. This total commodification reflects capitalism's tendency to transform all aspects of human existence into exchangeable values measured in money (Kökerer, 2024).

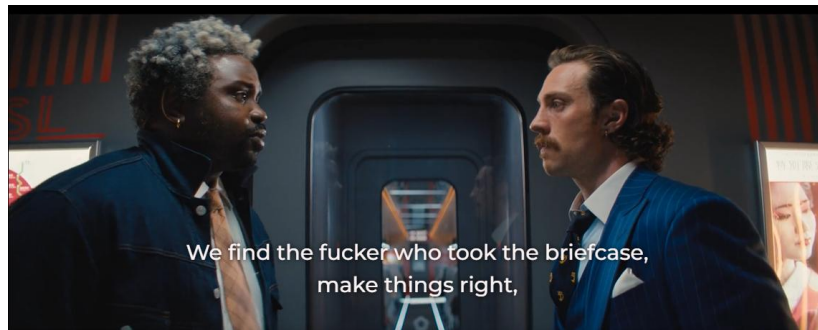


Figure 3. Lemon talked about the Briefcase with Tangerine (Minute 00:22:26)

Hierarchical Control: The Handler System

The film presents a clear hierarchical structure through the "handler" system, where characters like Ladybug receive orders from Maria Beetle, who herself operates within a larger organizational structure ultimately controlled by figures like the White Death. The film's early scene establishes this hierarchy when Ladybug speaks with Maria Beetle via phone. The dialogue reveals fundamental power dynamics where Maria initiates and controls the conversation, overrides Ladybug's personal preferences, and defines the parameters of his work without room for negotiation. When Ladybug expresses his desire to avoid violence, stating

"I am ready. You are getting the new, improved me. Because if you put peace out in the world, you get peace back,"

Maria dismisses this with

"I think you might be forgetting what you do for a living. Take the gun." This exchange exemplifies how workers' personal values and ethical commitments become subordinated to the demands of capital. Ladybug's attempted self-transformation, his therapy, his philosophical evolution is tolerated only insofar as it doesn't interfere with his productive capacity as an assassin.

Throughout the train journey, Ladybug remains in constant contact with Maria via earpiece, ensuring continuous monitoring of his activities. This surveillance represents what organizational theorists call "remote management" the ability to control workers at a distance through communication technology. Despite being a skilled operative, he cannot exercise true autonomy and must follow orders without full knowledge of their context. When complications arise and Ladybug discovers multiple assassins competing for the same briefcase, he calls Maria asking for an explanation: *"There's nothing simple about this job! Yeah, I'm not the only one on this train looking for this case."* Maria provides only partial information, enough to keep him functional but not enough for him to understand the full situation or make truly informed decisions. This information asymmetry is crucial to maintaining hierarchical control. As Fadillah (2024) notes, knowledge becomes a tool of domination when those above control what those below are allowed to know.

Maria Beetle herself occupies an interesting class position; she is neither purely bourgeois nor fully proletarian but represents what might be called the "professional-managerial class." She doesn't own the organization, yet she doesn't perform the dangerous physical labor either. Instead, she coordinates, communicates, and mediates between capital owners and workers. This

middle position reflects the stratification within contemporary capitalism, where management layers buffer direct contact between owners and workers, making exploitation less visible and resistance more difficult. Maria appears sympathetic to Ladybug, even expressing concern for his safety, yet she ultimately serves the interests of the organization that employs both of them. Her position demonstrates how capitalism creates intermediate classes whose interests align neither fully with capital nor fully with labor, complicating traditional Marxist class analysis.

The handler system also illustrates the fragmentation of labor under capitalism. Ladybug performs one specialized task (retrieval), Maria coordinates and provides information, other operatives handle different aspects of missions, and the White Death controls the overall strategic direction. This division of labor increases efficiency but also prevents workers from understanding the totality of the system they serve. No single worker comprehends the entire operation, making collective consciousness and organized resistance difficult to achieve. Each person knows only their role, remaining dependent on the coordination provided from above (Kurniawan, 2025).



Figure 4. Ladybug was ordered by Maria to take the gun (Minute 00:06:24)

Class Conflict in Bullet Train (2022)

1. Ladybug as the Proletarian Subject

Ladybug, as the film's protagonist, embodies the proletarian position within capitalist society. Unlike the White Death, who owns resources and commands others, Ladybug possesses only his labor power, his skills as an operative, which he must sell to survive. From the opening scene, his proletarian status is established through his subordination to Maria Beetle and his position as a replacement worker. When he explains he's trying to adopt a more peaceful approach to life, Maria dismisses his personal growth, revealing the fundamental proletarian condition: workers' personal desires and well-being are subordinate to the demands of labor. The fact that he replaces "Carver" who "called in sick" emphasizes his interchangeability within the system. Workers are not valued as unique individuals but as units of labor power that can be substituted when necessary.

Throughout the film, Ladybug experiences multiple forms of alienation as described by Marx. First, he is alienated from his labor process because he cannot control how he works. Maria directs him, overriding his preferences for peaceful resolution. Second, he is alienated from the product of his labor because he doesn't know what the briefcase contains or why it matters.

He merely retrieves it for someone else's benefit, producing value he will never personally claim. Third, he is alienated from fellow workers because the system forces him to fight other assassins rather than recognize their shared exploitation. When he encounters Tangerine and Lemon, potential allies who share his working-class position, violence becomes the only available mode of interaction. Finally, he is alienated from his own human potential, his desires for peace, personal growth, and meaningful existence are suppressed by the demands of commodified labor (Kökerer, 2024).

His encounter with The Wolf particularly demonstrates how the capitalist system creates conflicts between workers who have no real reason to be enemies. The Wolf, a Mexican cartel assassin, attacks Ladybug believing he poisoned the Wolf's entire wedding party. Ladybug desperately protests:

"Dude, I don't even know you!"

Yet the Wolf's rage, fueled by genuine tragedy, cannot be redirected toward the actual perpetrators, the White Death and his organization who orchestrated the massacre. Instead, two workers destroy each other while the bourgeoisie benefits from the chaos. The Wolf's accidental death, his knife bouncing off the briefcase into his own throat, serves as a tragic metaphor for how workers under capitalism often become instruments of their own destruction while capital (the briefcase) remains intact and protected.

Ladybug's repeated attribution of events to *"bad luck"* reveals how bourgeois ideology obscures structural causes of exploitation. When he faces danger, betrayal, or violence, he personalizes these experiences as individual misfortune rather than recognizing them as consequences of systemic inequality. This individualization prevents class consciousness by making workers blame themselves, fate, or chance rather than identifying capital and its defenders as the source of their problems. As Sardar (2024) argues, hegemonic ideology succeeds when the oppressed internalize explanations that absolve the system and attribute suffering to personal failure or random circumstance.

Despite his skills, experience, and intelligence, Ladybug survives primarily through luck, finding a mascot costume that cushions his fall during the train crash, accidentally swapping poisoned water bottles with the Hornet, stumbling into advantages through coincidence. This emphasis on luck over agency or power highlights the precarity of proletarian existence. While the bourgeoisie shape circumstances through control of resources, workers can only react to situations beyond their control, hoping to survive through skill and fortune. Ladybug's vulnerability contrasts sharply with the White Death's invulnerability throughout most of the film, a class distinction made visceral through narrative structure.



Figure 5. Ladybug protests to Wolf because of his sudden attack (Minute 00:29:13)

2. The Assassins as Competing Workers

The various assassins aboard the train represent different segments of the working class forced into competition by capitalist structures. Tangerine and Lemon's partnership, while genuine on a personal level, remains confined within capitalist logic. They protect each other but never question the system that forces them to work for a ruthless crime boss. When they encounter Ladybug, instead of recognizing him as a fellow exploited worker, they immediately view him as a threat and competitor, demonstrating how capitalism fragments the working class and prevents collective consciousness.

The Prince represents a particularly interesting case of proletarian manipulation of fellow proletarians. Despite her youth and apparent innocence, she skillfully exploits others' assumptions and vulnerabilities through tactical manipulation. However, her power is entirely temporary and tactical, lacking real resources or institutional backing. Her eventual failure demonstrates that individual cunning cannot overcome structural disadvantages, and workers without capital remain vulnerable regardless of their tactical skill.



Figure 6. The prince ordered Kimura to stay until he could crack the code on the suitcase.
(Minute 00:47:03)

3. The Absence of Class Consciousness and Solidarity

One of the most striking aspects of Bullet Train is the complete absence of class consciousness among the characters. Despite their shared position as workers exploited by powerful employers, they never recognize their common interests or attempt collective resistance. This

absence reflects how capitalism fragments the working class and prevents the development of solidarity (Fadillah, 2024). The characters' individualism extends even to their understanding of problems when Ladybug faces difficulties, he attributes them to "bad luck" rather than systemic issues, internalizing responsibility for conditions he does not control. This personalization of structural exploitation represents the success of bourgeois ideology in obscuring the true nature of class relations.

Multiple moments throughout the film present opportunities for solidarity that go unrealized. When Ladybug first encounters Tangerine and Lemon, he attempts to explain that he's "*just here for the case*" and suggests they could "*work something out.*" Yet even this limited cooperation, avoiding conflict rather than genuine alliance, proves impossible. The assassins have been so thoroughly conditioned to compete that they cannot imagine cooperation even when it would serve their mutual interests. They spend the film fighting each other over a briefcase none of them will ultimately possess, while the White Death benefits regardless of which worker survives.

This atomization reflects what Marx described as the alienation of workers from each other. Under capitalism, workers are forced to view fellow workers as competitors rather than potential allies. The system creates scarcity, only one assassin can "succeed" in retrieving the briefcase, only some will survive to collect payment, making cooperation appear irrational from an individual perspective. Yet this apparent rationality serves bourgeois interests by preventing collective action that could challenge exploitation. If the assassins recognized their shared exploitation and united against the White Death, they would have overwhelming force and could potentially transform the system. Instead, they destroy each other while he watches for safety.

The film shows no character who articulates class consciousness or attempts to organize collective resistance. Even Kimura, forced into the situation by threats to his son, focuses purely on individual survival rather than questioning the system that enables such coercion. The Elder, who might provide moral leadership given his age and traditional authority, ultimately serves the interests of maintaining the existing order. He represents old power structures that predate modern capitalism but have been integrated into it, lending legitimacy through tradition rather than challenging exploitation through moral authority. No one suggests that the assassins could ally, refuse their missions, or confront their employers; such possibilities remain literally unthinkable within the film's ideological framework.

This absence of revolutionary consciousness reflects what Gramsci termed "hegemony" the success of dominant classes in making their worldview appear as common sense to everyone, including the oppressed (Sardar, 2024). The assassins accept that they must compete, that violence is necessary, that survival requires eliminating others, and that questioning the system is futile or impossible. These assumptions are never explicitly stated or defended because they have been internalized as self-evident truth. The film thus reproduces the ideological conditions that enable capitalist exploitation, presenting a world where resistance appears impossible and competition inevitable.



Figure 7. Lemon asked Ladybug what plans he had for the suitcase. (Minute 00:37:43)



Figure 8. Ladybug tried to explain to Lemon the win-win solution (Minute 00:37:45)

The Train as Metaphor for Capitalist Society

The train itself functions as a powerful metaphor for capitalist society and class relations. As a confined space moving inexorably toward a predetermined destination, it represents how capitalism constrains and directs human life according to logic beyond individual control. The train's luxury contrasts with the violence occurring within it, mirroring how capitalism produces wealth alongside exploitation. The hierarchical structure of the train reflects social stratification in capitalist society, while its eventual derailment suggests both the destructiveness of capitalist competition and the potential for systemic collapse



Figure 9. Bullet Train

Discussion

This study shows that *Bullet Train* (2022), despite being positioned as popular entertainment, reflects and normalizes capitalist class relations through its narrative structure, character hierarchy, and symbolism. The film constructs power as something structural and impersonal, most clearly embodied by White Death, whose dominance is rooted in ownership and control rather than physical labor. His prolonged absence emphasizes how capitalist authority operates through systems and fear rather than direct coercion, encouraging workers to internalize discipline and accept exploitation as inevitable.

The suitcase serves as a central metaphor for capital, revealing the alienation inherent in capitalist labor relations. Although it contains enormous monetary value, none of the workers competing for it have access to or control over that value, illustrating commodity fetishism and the disposable nature of labor. The management system further reinforces hierarchical control by introducing managerial intermediaries who coordinate labor while obscuring responsibility, showing how modern capitalism maintains exploitation through mediation rather than direct command.

Class conflict in *Bullet Train* is persistent yet fragmented, as proletarian characters are forced to compete rather than solidarize. The absence of class consciousness, exemplified by Ladybug's tendency to interpret suffering as personal "bad luck," reflects the success of hegemonic ideology in naturalizing inequality and closing off the possibility of collective resistance. The train itself symbolizes capitalist society as a closed system moving toward crisis without transformation, reinforcing the film's ideological message that survival is individual and systemic alternatives remain unthinkable.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Bullet Train* (2022) presents a sophisticated representation of power, class conflict, and ideological domination within capitalist society, demonstrating how contemporary popular cinema reproduces dominant social relations even when framed as entertainment. Through its narrative structure, characterization, and symbolism, the film constructs capitalism as a system in which bourgeois power operates impersonally through economic control and mediation, while proletarian figures compete violently for survival without access to collective consciousness or systemic alternatives. The White Death embodies structural capitalist authority, the briefcase symbolizes capital that generates conflict among workers, and the train itself functions as a metaphor for a hierarchical system moving toward crisis without transformation. The absence of class consciousness and collective resistance illustrates the effectiveness of hegemonic ideology in naturalizing exploitation and foreclosing revolutionary possibilities. As such, *Bullet Train* is valuable for Marxist film analysis not because it depicts overt class struggle, but because it reveals capitalism at its most successful, when inequality is normalized, solidarity is fragmented, and resistance is reduced to individual survival.

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